

Message Text

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FOLLOWING REPEAT NEW DELHI 7637 ACTION SECSTATE, BOMBAY
CALCUTTA, KATHMANDU, AND MADRAS DATED MAY15, 1978.

QUOTE: UNCLAS NEW DELHI 7637

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PBOR IN BD

SUBJECT: ANOTHER INDO-BANGLADESH RIVER PROBLEM

1. ANOTHER INDO-BANGLADESH RIVER DISPUTE WAS RAISED IN THE
RAJYA SABHA MAY 12. BIPINPAL DAS OF CONGRESS COMPLAINED
THAT THREE SPURS ERECTED BY THE BDG IN THE KUSHIARA RIVER
THREATENED SERIOUS EROSION TO KARIMGANJ TOWN IN ASSAM. IN
HIS REPLY, FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE SAID THAT THE GOI WAS
AWARE OF THE PROBLEM OF EROSION AND HAD MADE EFFORTS TO SEEK
A SATISFACTORY SOLUTION BUT "UNFORTUNATELY," DESPITE HAVING
RAISED THE ISSUE A NUMBER OF TIMES WITH THE BDG, IT HAD
NOT YET FOUND A SOLUTION.

2. VAJPAYEE NOTED THAT THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY PASSED
THROUGH THE MID-STREAM OF THE KUSHIARA AND EXPLAINED THAT
BECAUSE OF THE MEANDERING NATURE OF THE RIVER, BOTH
COUNTRIES HAD UNDERTAKEN SINCE 1956 THE CONSTRUCTION
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PAGE 02 STATE 125184

OF TIMBER SPURS ON THEIR RESPECTIVE BANKS OF THE RIVER
WHICH HAD BEEN SUBJECT TO CLAIMS AND COUNTERCLAIMS
REGARDING THEIR NECESSITY AND THEIR ADVERSE
CONSEQUENCIES. WHEN THE GOI LEARNED IN JULY 1977
THAT TWO BOULDER SPURS WERE BEING CONSTRUCTED WHICH
"STOOD ALMOST UPTO A THIRD OF THE RIVER", IT
RECOMMENDED TO THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT THAT SIMILAR SPURS

BE CONSTRUCTED ON THE INDIAN SIDE. (IT IS UNCLEAR, HOWEVER, FROM THE OFFICIAL AND PRESS REPORTS OF THE DEBATE WHETHER THESE SPURS WERE ACTUALLY CONSTRUCTED.) VAJPAYEE GAVE THE CHRONOLOGY OF UNSUCCESSFUL CONSULTATIONS WITH THE BDG ON THE ISSUE AND SAID THAT IN THE GOI'S OPINION "THE ACTION ON SUCH MATTERS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN CONSULTATION WITH EACH OTHER BECAUSE UNILATERAL ACTION COULD ONLY LEAD TO COUNTER-ACTION, THEREBY COMPLICATING THE PROBLEM RATHER THAN SOLVING IT." SUCH PROBLEMS WERE BEST SOLVED WITHIN THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK, SUCH AS THE JOINT RIVER COMMISSION AND ON THE BASIS OF JOINT STUDIES.

3. REPLYING TO CHARGES THAT THE BDG WAS "CLEVERLY AND CLANDESTINELY" TRYING TO SHIFT THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY TOWARD THE INDIAN SIDE, VAJPAYEE SAID THAT THE BDG CLAIMED THEY WERE TRYING TO SAVE THEIR AREA FROM EROSION BUT, HE ADDED, IF THE RESULT WAS A SHIFTING OF THE BOUNDARIES, THEN IT WAS A SERIOUS MATTER. THE GOI HAD BROUGHT THE BOUNDARY ISSUE TO THE ATTENTION OF THE BDG AND ALSO TOLD THE BDG THAT FURTHER CONSTRUCTION OF SPURS SHOULD STOP. AS FOR EFFORTS TO SAVE KARIMGANJ, VAJPAYEE INTIMATED THAT THE INDIANS HAD NOT ACTED PROMPTLY ENOUGH BUT WITH THE MONSOON APPROACHING THE PLANNING COMMISSION WAS PREPARED TO GIVE MONEY FROM THE CENTRE TO THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT IN

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PAGE 03 STATE 125184

ORDER TO SAVE THE TOWN.

4. PRESS COVERAGE OF VAJPAYEE'S REMARKS STRESSED THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER HAD THREATENED "COUNTER-ACTION", A BELLICOSE READING NOT BORNE OUT BY THE OFFICIAL SUMMARY OF THE PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS.

GOHEEN

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